

Steps For Better Sleep

- **Get in bed only if you are sleepy.** This helps reduce the amount of time you lay in bed awake.
- **Struggling to fall asleep just leads to frustration.** If you don't fall asleep within 15 to 20 minutes, get up. Go to the other room and read or do something monotonous until you become sleepy. Don't perform an engaging activity such as office work or housework. Don't expose yourself to bright light while you are up. Light cues your brain that it is time to wake up.
- **Maintain a regular sleep schedule.** Start going to bed and waking up at the same time, even on the weekend or holidays.
- **Don't under or oversleep.** Sleep just enough to avoid daytime sleepiness, but not so much that you have trouble falling asleep again the next night.
- **Avoid napping during the day.** This will ensure you are tired at bedtime. If you can't make it through the day without a nap, sleep less than one hour before 3 pm.
- **Don't use your bed as an office, workroom, or media room.** Let your body know that the bed is associated with sleeping.
- **Make sure that the bedroom is pleasant and relaxing.** The bedding should be comfortable, the room should not be too hot or cold and light and sound should be kept to a minimum. If the light in the early morning bothers you, get a blackout shade or wear a slumber mask. If noise bothers you, wear earplugs or get a white noise machine.
- **Turn off the TV, smartphone, or other sources of blue light.** While the light of any kind can suppress the secretion of melatonin, blue light does so more powerfully. These devices are also engaging and may make it more difficult to quiet the mind to sleep. At bedtime, electronic devices should be turned off. Some people find that music helps them go to sleep. Since this is a less engaging medium, it is probably a better choice. Just make sure your device is not emitting light while it is playing.
- **Don't watch the clock.** Staring at a clock in your bedroom, either when you are trying to fall asleep or when you wake in the middle of the night, can actually increase stress, making it harder to fall asleep. Turn your clock's face away from you.
- **Do what you can to limit worries and stress around bedtime.** Avoid potentially emotionally upsetting conversations and activities just before you get in your bed. If you have something on your mind, try doing some relaxation exercises, such as yoga, deep breathing, or meditation. You can also try journaling before bed. Write down what is on your mind and then set them aside.
- **Establish a pre-bedtime ritual.** This gives your body cues that it is time to slow down and sleep. Listen to relaxing music, read something soothing, or have a cup of caffeine-free tea.
- **Avoid stimulants such as caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol 4-6 hours before bedtime.** While alcohol has an immediate sleep-inducing effect, a few hours later, as the alcohol levels in your blood start to fall, there is a stimulant effect.

- **Don't go to bed hungry or stuffed.** Eating heavy meals or foods you have never had before close to bedtime may cause gastric activity that could wake you. Likewise, an empty stomach rattling in the night might also cause loss of sleep. If you are hungry, try a light snack before bed. Warm milk and foods high in the amino acid tryptophan, such as bananas, may help aid in sleep.
- **Balance fluid intake.** Drink enough at night to keep from waking up thirsty but not so much that you will wake up needing a trip to the bathroom.
- **Exercise regularly but not right before bed.** A good exercise routine can promote sleep. Vigorous exercise should be done in the morning or late afternoon. Relaxing exercises, like yoga or an after-dinner walk, can be done a few hours before going to sleep.
- **Use light to your advantage.** Natural light keeps your internal clock on a healthy sleep-wake cycle. Get some sunlight first thing in the morning and get out of the office for a sun break during the day.
- **Avoid sleeping pills or use them cautiously.** Most doctors do not prescribe sleeping pills for periods of more than two weeks. Do not drink alcohol while taking sleeping pills.

RESOURCES:

For more information on ways to get restful sleep, check out the following resources on the subject.

- *I Can Make You Sleep: Overcome Insomnia Forever and Get the Best Rest of Your Life. -- Paul McKenna*

SOURCE: sleepfoundation.org, harvard.edu